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AUTHOR Foster, Herbert L.
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ABSTRACT

The New Teacher and Teacher Aide Project, a joint venture of the Faculty of Educational Studies, State University of New York at Buffalo and the Buffalo Public Schools, was designed to help new secondary teachers of disadvantaged youth in an inner-city school system. The project had four components: (1) a pre-program orientation; (2) small group meetings; (3) a crisis service; and (4) topical workshops and meetings. Orientation, prior to the opening of school, consisted of panel discussions involving students, parents and principals, and second-year teachers and a session devoted to helping new teachers plan their first week of school as well as desensitizing them to student behavior problems and improving their ability to communicate with the inner-city student body. Small group discussions were problem centered and dealt with the teachers' concerns. Personality problems and specific classroom problems were discussed, and attempts were made to help participants deal with personal feelings and attitudes that might influence or interfere with classroom procedures. Discussions centered on the issues of: (1) problems with discipline; (2) dependency, anxiety, and sexuality in children; (3) problems in teachers' handling of their feelings of hostility; (4) discouragement over working in a difficult situation; (5) racial feelings; (6) problems with the school's administrative hierarchy; (7) problems in obtaining help of school psychologists and social workers; and (8) problems relating to parents and older teachers. An ongoing crises service was established to enable teachers to call upon staff members about personal or professional concerns any time of the day or night. Topical meetings and workshops were built around areas of stress that appeared to be paramount among the staff. Two workshops were organized dealing with aggression and violence in the school and drug problems. (JD)

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PREVENTING DISTRESS AND BURNOUT - A PROJECT THAT WORKED: THE NEW TEACHER AND TEACHER AIDE PROJECT

Herbert L. Foster, Ed. D.
Professor
Department of Learning and Instruction
Room 582 Baldy Hall
Faculty of Educational Studies
State University of New York at Buffalo
Amherst, New York 14260

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Recent educational literature and in-service programming indicates an interest in teacher stress and burnout. Further examination of this issue in the literature and in-service programs suggests a treatment of the subject in general terms and in suggesting causes, symptoms, and, often, self-help activities to overcome and deal with stress and burnout.

However, there appeared to be no mention in the literature of successful in-service or in-school stress and burnout prevention programming for large numbers of staff. The New Teacher and Teacher Aide Project,[1] a joint venture of Faculty of Educational Studies, The State University of New York at Buffalo and the Buffalo Public Schools in 1970 and 1971, was such a project, and should be reported because of its success and the present need for school district wide stress and burnout prevention programs. Not counting teacher Aides, 136 teachers were involved in the two years of the project.

Though the New Teacher and Teacher Aide Project was designed to help new secondary teachers of disadvantaged youth, and Teacher Aides, it is replicable today as an intervention and prevention model to help educators cope with stress and burnout. Although the project had four components: 1) a pre-program orientation; 2) small group meetings; 3) a crisis service; and 4) topical workshops and meetings; the small group meetings were the heart of the program. However, the combination made the difference.

Indeed, to maximize in-service effectiveness, programming must be ongoing and reality oriented. A one shot in-service day is,

most often, a waste of time, effort, and tax dollars.

STAFFING

University faculty, Buffalo Board of Education teachers, and advanced graduate students, many with teaching experience, were involved as staff. Additionally, the staff was integrated as to sex and racial background, and members from minority backgrounds were in all positions.

ORIENTATION

The orientation consisted of five sessions from 1:00 until 4:30 P.M., prior to the start of school. The first afternoon included registration, an introduction, and a student panel. The student panel consisted of seven tough black and white male and female teens discussing how they tested their teachers. Needless to say, most of the new teachers refused to believe them. The students also expressed their feelings about good versus bad teachers, and then participated as staff members for the remainder of the orientation.

The second day consisted of parent and principal panels. Both parents and principals told the teachers what they expected of them. Interestingly, a verbal scuffle involved the parents and the students with the parents more conservative concerning dress and behavior.

The panel for the third day consisted of a number of second-year teachers describing their first year trials and tribulations. This was an excellent panel with good questioning and discussion.

Teachers and aides visited their schools on the fourth day, and the Project staff was available for meetings.

The last day of the orientation included new teachers working with our staff: 1) to plan their first week of school; 2) in foul language desensitization and understanding; and 3) in communication in general and black dialect in particular.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Teachers and aides were divided into eight groups which met after school in two centrally located inner city schools. Assignments to schools were by individual preference with small group assignments made homogeneously as to sex and racial background.

Discussion groups were co-led by an educator, and a faculty member experienced in group therapy or sensitivity groups. Group sessions were taped with participant permission. Co-leaders often played recordings for self-evaluation, to discover points in the discussion needing more emphasis or clarification at later sessions, and issues unanswered or unresolved.

Co-leaders met weekly as a group with an outside leader, who acted as a consultant and facilitator in the group process. Co-leaders received help in their relationships and role with their groups from these meetings. Problems confronting leaders were presented at these meetings, and attempts made to resolve them.

Group discussions were problem centered, dealt with the teachers' concerns, and focused on here and now group processes only when such processes interfered with the ongoing consideration of problems (e.g., silence related to unvoiced disagreements;

monopolization of "air time;" critical or nonaccepting attitudes of group members toward each other that promote defensiveness, etc.).

Groups were not for sensitivity training nor did they assume psychopathology. They did assume that in any interaction with children, parents, or administration, the teacher's feelings and attitudes played an important role. The assumption was made that the first year of teaching is in the nature of a normal developmental crisis, and that the resolution of that crisis shapes the teacher's professional self.

Personality problems as well as specific classroom problems were dealt with within the group as leaders lent their professional expertise to help participants to resolve arising problems. The sessions were for the most part group counseling sessions without either leader dominating discussions with lectures or passing judgments as to right or wrong ways of behaving. Attempts were made to maintain a "group theory" concept as much as possible.

The first goal of discussion groups was to reduce the personal stress around anxiety, tension, and strain which is inevitable in young teachers, if not all teachers. A second goal was to help participants to deal with personal feelings and attitudes that may influence or interfere with classroom problem solving. A range of alternative solutions became available to participants as a consequence of discussions and input.

A third goal was to help children through working with teachers. Most classroom problems (though certainly not all) are resolved by teachers. In any event, even where rare outside help is available, teachers are still faced with handling the child's prob-

lem daily. The reality is that intervention at the classroom level is critically important in dealing with the 10-to-30 percent of children, defined by teachers, as having adjustment or learning problems.

In addition, the groups were designed to meet several problems arising with new teachers and also associated with contemporary stress and burnout problems. First, because teachers often are lonely and isolated from each other, they rarely have the the opportunity to discuss their teaching problems openly and frankly with each other. Consequently, many teachers have difficulty in distinguishing between problems related to difficult situations and those related to personal attitudes and to emotions. Additionally, they don't realize that others have the same problems. Moreover, because of the supervisory process of evaluating teachers, most teachers are reluctant to go to their supervisor with problems. The game frequently becomes one of concealing and covering up mistakes rather than examining them to learn and grow.

Second, help is usually made available only when a teacher cannot handle a problem. Consequently, seeking help is an implicit admission of failure. Discussion groups built on the concept that problems are to be expected, and suggested consideration of alternatives at an early stage in the teacher's awareness of a problem.

Third, teachers frequently have problems in knowing: (1) how much responsibility to take for difficult emotional and social problems among their students; (2) how closely they can permit themselves to relate to their students; (3) how to deal with

discipline, especially as it relates to the teacher's attitudes toward accepting and integrating the authority mold; (4) how to maintain an idealistic attitude when practical considerations force change; (5) how to relate to older teachers, principals, and supervisors; and (6) how to develop confidence in their own judgment. Discussion groups permitted the airing of these personal, very important issues in a way that usually is not provided in schools.

Fourth, teachers in inner city schools frequently suffered "culture shock" and it was important to explore these feelings and attitudes as they work in difficult and different situations. Discussion groups aired and often clarified such issues for teachers.

An analysis of the tapes suggested that the open format of the small groups encouraged the discussion of a large variety of issues including: (1) problems with discipline; (2) dependency, anxiety, and sexuality in children; (3) problems in teacher's handling or their feelings of hostility; (4) the sense of discouragement over working in a difficult situation; (5) racial feeings; (6) problems with the administrative hierarchy of the school; (7) problems in obtaining help of school psychologists and social workers; and (8) problems in relating to parents and older teachers.

Reviewing the tapes indicated that, for most of the participants, the sense of loneliness and isolation was overcome by group meetings. The most important index of this was the reluctance of groups to disband as the program drew to a formal conclusion. In addition to the teachers, the group leaders reported feeling a sense of loss, as when one departs from a friend. In fact, three

groups decided to continue and met a number of times past the formal sessions.

The discussion groups provided a forum for the catharsis of feeling, for consideration of issues important to teachers, but rarely considered or confronted in any positive forum, and for replenishment of psychic resources used up during the teacher's professional activities. Teachers talked about "feeling refreshed," or of getting "a little ray of hope" from the sessions. Several spoke of the relief from feelings of guilt and personal inadequacy derived from learning that others were experiencing similar problems and perceptions. Virtually any time that these issues were broached during a discussion, an aura of "me too" comaraderie emerged quickly and pervasively.

At first, groups had insufficient time for detailed presentations of specific instances, and others in the group often found little interest in discussing specific problems with specific children and would rather confront the general issues involved -- loneliness, interpersonal relationships, responsibility, children's emotions, discipline, etc. Eventually, however, many groups were able to use the discussion sessions to work out specific teaching problems, or problems with specific children.

CRISIS SERVICE

Participants could call upon any staff member with any personal or professional concern any time of the day or night beyond the weekly meetings. At the caller's discretion, conversations or meetings could be held either over the phone or in person.

A mimeographed list of all staff and participants' school and home addresses and telephone numbers was provided.

Some crisis service discussions covered personal problems that indirectly affected teaching competence. The greatest use of the crisis service came around the time of parent visitations and grading.

TOPICAL MEETINGS AND WORKSHOPS

As group discussion leaders noted participants becoming anxious and concerned around certain areas, rather than waiting for the stress to turn to distress, topical presentations and workshops were held dealing with stressful areas. Additionally, experienced teachers were asked to act as advisors to those teachers appearing to be experiencing difficulties.

Some of the topical meetings, at which attendance was optional, included:

1. Behavioral objectives
2. Report card grading
3. Questioning techniques
4. Pupil-teacher planning
5. Motivational techniques
6. Individualizing instruction
7. Working with parents

Two all-day workshops were organized dealing with aggression and violence in school, and the drug problem. These workshops were also open to the public.

Aggression and Violence in the Classroom

Dr. Nicholas J. Long, then Director of Hillcrest Children's Mental Health Center, Washington, D.C., and Professor of Education at American University, provided insights into the behavior of violent and aggressive youth and suggested techniques for dealing with these problem students. The lecture was followed by twelve small group discussions led by staff members.

DRUG ABUSE AMONG SCHOOL YOUTH

A panel of experts in the mental health field presented factual information concerning the availability, dissemination, and behavioral aspects of drug abusers. Panel presentations were followed by ten small group meetings for panelists, former addicts, and parents of addicts leading discussions.

EVALUATION

The general objective, to help new secondary teachers of disadvantaged students to face the problems encountered in their first year, was achieved with a great deal of success. Only two teachers in our program left the Buffalo School System during the program's operation in the 1970-71 school year. One teacher left because of emotional problems, and a second moved to California to care for an ailing mother.

Weekly attendance was high, and the intensity of group discussions was lively. Many teachers felt they profited from the openness and acceptance of problems and incidents by the groups.

Two areas related to models for emulation which were neither

part of the objectives not formally evaluated but certainly had a positive effect on the participants were that: (1) our staff was racially integrated and functioned together well; and (2) our staff disagreed with one another in class in a nonthreatening and acceptable professional manner. The disagreements came about often in discussions of techniques of teaching, and it helped get across the idea of individual teaching styles and techniques, and the possibility of not being threatened when someone disagrees with you in a classroom.

One frequent consequence of the group meetings was the realization by teachers that many of the problems defied individual solution. While such a realization resulted in the relief of feelings of guilt and inadequacy, it may also have influenced some to leave the situation, having diagnosed it has an impossible one.

In the early days of our program, many teachers and aides informed us that the only teachers or aides they knew in their schools were the teachers or aides they met in our program. Furthermore, many teachers informed us that they would have left teaching were it not for our project. Some achieved greater acceptance of their feelings toward children, and some were able to feel more comfortable having obtained realistic expectations about what they might manage to accomplish with their students.

In the main, our assessment was that the most important ingredient the teachers received was help in the form of on-going support from other teachers and staff.

NOTES

[1] The New Teacher and Teacher Aide Project was funded by the Office of Urban Teacher Corps, The State Department of Education, Albany, New York, under Contracts C-37075 and C-45609. Approximately 129 teachers and 50 teacher aides completed the project.

[2] For a more detailed description of the project, see Ribbin', jivin' and playin' the dozens: The unrecognized dilemma of inner city schools. Cambridge, Mass.: Ballinger Publishing Company, 1974, pp. 312-313; and Cole, R. W., Jr. Ribbin', jivin' and playin' the dozens. Phi Delta Kappa, 1974, 56, 171-175.

[3] The concept of the New Teacher and Teacher Aid Project continues as a graduate course titled - Seminar In Mental Health, Methods, and Techniques of Teaching. Each three hour course meeting is divided between a human relations activity, a discussion around classroom problems and ideas, and working through stress and burnout.